

A Father's Thoughts About a Son and Brother

By Joe Hrovat (Beta Nu/Case Western Reserve University '80)

It had been about 24 years since I had participated in our beloved Ritual. As I looked around the chapter room on that night, early last November, I saw the young faces of the undergraduate members of Eta Chi Chapter of George Mason University. These men, who I've grown to know as loving and respectful brothers, had kindly invited me to deliver the Alumnus Charge at this initiation. By itself, this was special to me, since I had only participated in Ritual as an undergraduate, the last time as a graduating senior of my chapter, Beta Nu of Case Western Reserve University, in 1980. It was also special in that brother Willie Bartok, who I knew from my chapter, had been the installing president for Eta Chi's chapter installation in 1982. So, there I was, continuing the link between our two chapters.

But what was most special to me was that of the 17 men to be initiated this night, one of them was my son, Alex.

When Alex decided to attend GMU, I had hoped, as most Theta Chi dads do, that he might take interest in joining a fraternity, and in particular, Theta Chi. But with that "encouraging but not pushing" balancing act that most of us try to pull off, my advice to him was to only join a fraternity if he felt comfortable with what that fraternity stood for and that he was compatible with all its members.

My love for our Fraternity has always been apparent to my family. I often talked of the brotherhood and tried to live its noble ideals through my life. At an event for freshmen his first semester, Alex had recognized our Greek letters on some members, and when he said them aloud to some of his friends from high school, naturally the brothers approached him. They learned that he knew them because of me—and they recruited him as a "legacy." To me, it was no surprise that he was drawn to Theta Chi and that it appealed to him, as he had some of its ideals already being instilled in him. He had caught the attention of the brothers of this chapter, things seemed 'right,' and the process of him becoming a Theta Chi had begun.

Alex didn't know I would be attending or participating in his initiation.

The brothers and I wanted to surprise him. I watched his face as he progressed through Ritual, remembering fondly my own initiation and the several in which I had participated. He shared with me later, "I didn't know what to think during Ritual, the whole thing was a very new and exciting experience for me." When he did realize I was there as I grasped his hand in welcome, he told me that, "an extreme feeling of pride and joy swept over me. I didn't think you were going to be at Ritual, let alone give the Alumnus Charge. I'm proud of you for being there, and that moment will stay with me for the rest of my life."

It's hard to verbalize the feelings I had when I shared the grip for the first time with my son. Pride, love, and joy were all definitely there, but it went beyond these. The bond that I have with Alex as a father to son has become so much more special and unique. In describing this feeling to others, Alex echoes my own feelings: "My father and I now share a special bond that not many other father and sons have. Our being brothers of Theta Chi has made our relationship so much deeper, and I now feel closer to my father than I ever have before."

That was such a wonderful and special night, as was our visit to Beta Nu over the Thanksgiving weekend just a couple weeks later, where Alex got to meet with Willie Bartok, Edgar Stehli and Dale Pulver. Edgar, Dale and I were at Eta Chi together. Our visit included touring the house, Willie recollecting the installation of Eta Chi, and all of us recounting our numerous stories from our days together. Using Alex's words, in which he put it so well: "the visit was awesome."

I am so glad Alex has decided to make Theta Chi part of his life. I am proud of him as a wonderful son and am honored to call him "brother." I'm so thankful to him and the brothers of Eta Chi and Beta Nu for renewing my appreciation for the phrase "Theta Chi for Life," which is another special thing I can now share with Alex "for life."

Fraternally,
A proud dad and
brother of Alex Hrovat
(Eta Chi/George Mason
University '08)



Son and Dad, Brother and Brother.



Joining Joe Hrovat, left, in front of the Beta Nu chapter house at Case Western Reserve University, are Edgar Stehli, Willie Bartok, Kim Stehli, Dale Pulver, and Alex Hrovat.